Module 3 - Grant Proposal Writing II

After learning how to write grant proposals, it is now important to know some important facts and useful tactics when submitting proposals to a foundation or other funders.

Learning Objectives:

- To understand the importance of presentation when writing a grant proposal
- To understand common mistakes in the process of grant proposal writing
- To understand what kinds of projects typically achieve successes when submitted

OVERALL CONSIDERATONS

An effective grant proposal has to make a compelling case. Not only must the idea be a good one, but so must the presentation. Here is a checklist of things to be considered:

* All of the requirements of the funding source must be met: prescribed format, necessary inclusions, deadlines, etc;

* The proposal should have a clear, descriptive title;

* The proposal should be a cohesive whole, building logically, with one section leading to another; this is an especially important consideration when several people have been involved in its preparation;

* Language should be clear and concise, devoid of jargon; explanations should be offered for acronyms and terms, which may be unfamiliar to someone outside the field;

* Each of the parts of the proposal should provide as brief a narrative as possible, with supporting data put into an appendix.

* Try to keep the proposal under 10 pages when possible.

At various stages in the proposal writing process, the proposal should be reviewed by a number of interested and disinterested parties. Each time it has been critiqued, it may be necessary to rethink the project and its presentation. While such revision is necessary to clarify the proposal, one of the dangers is that the original excitement of those making the proposal sometimes gets written out. Somehow, this must be conveyed in the final proposal. Make it interesting!

PARTS OF THE PROPOSAL

Cover Letter

The cover letter should be written on the applicant's letterhead, and should be signed by the organization's highest official. It should be addressed to the individual at the funding source with whom the organization has dealt, and should refer to earlier discussions. While giving a brief outline of the needs addressed in the proposal, the cover letter should demonstrate a familiarity with the mission of the grantmaking organization and emphasize the ways in which this project contributes to these goals.

Summary or Abstract

Although the summary is placed as the first item in the proposal, **it should not be written until the rest of the proposal has been developed.** The summary should include a description of the applicant, a definition of the problem to be solved, a statement of the objectives to be achieved, an outline of the activities and procedures to be used to accomplish those objectives, a description of the evaluation design, plans for the project at the end of the grant, and a statement of what it will cost the funding agency.

Introduction

In the introduction, applicants describe their organization and demonstrate that they are qualified to carry out the proposed project. This section should give a brief history of the organization, its mission, and its significant accomplishments. It should tell about the qualifications of its professional staff and list its board of directors. Reference should be made to grants, endorsements, and press coverage the organization has already received. (Supporting documents can be included in the Appendix.) Applicants should indicate whether funds for other parts of the project are being sought elsewhere. Such evidence will, in fact, strengthen the proposal, demonstrating to the reviewing officer that all avenues of support have been thoroughly explored.

It is in the introduction that applicants make the point that they are a good investment. Statements made here should be carefully tailored to the funding source, pointing out that the overall goals and purposes of the applicant are consistent with those of the funding source.

Problem Statement or Needs Assessment

This section lays out the reason for the proposal. It should provide well-documented evidence of a specific problem, explained from the beneficiaries' viewpoint. One of the pitfalls to be avoided is defining the problem as a lack of program or facility, i.e., giving one of the possible solutions to a problem as the problem itself. For example, the lack of a medical center in an economically depressed area is not the problem -- the problem is that poor people in the area have health needs that are not currently being addressed. **The problem described should be of reasonable dimensions, with the targeted population and geographic area clearly defined.** It should include a retrospective view of the situation, describing past efforts to ameliorate it, and projections for the future. The problem statement, developed with input from the beneficiaries, must be supported by statistics and statements from authorities in the field. The case must be made that the applicant, because of its

history, demonstrable skills, and past accomplishments is the right organization to solve the problem.

Objectives

Once the needs have been described, proposed solutions have to be set forth, wherever possible in numerical terms. The population to be served, time frame of the project, and specific outcomes must be defined. These measurable objectives form the basis for judging the effectiveness of the program. It is important not to confuse objectives with methods toward those ends. For example, the objective should not be stated as "building a prenatal clinic in Adams County," but as "reducing the infant mortality rate in Adams County to X per cent by a specific date." Notice that the difference between the two is that the second addresses specific objectives or the ends, rather than the means. The clinic is a means to achieving the objective and should be described as a method.

Methods or Procedures

Just as the statement of objectives builds on the problem statement, the description of methods or procedures builds on the statement of objectives. For each objective, a specific plan of action should be laid out. It should delineate a sequence of justifiable activities, indicating the proposed staffing and timetable for each task. This section should be carefully reviewed to make sure that what is being proposed is realistic in terms of the applicant's resources and time frame.

Evaluation

An evaluation plan should be a consideration **at every stage of the proposal's development**. Data collected for the problem statement form a comparative basis for determining whether measurable objectives are indeed being met and whether proposed methods are accomplishing these ends, or whether different parts of the plan need to be fine-tuned to be made more effective.

Among the considerations will be whether evaluation will be done by the organization itself or by outside experts. The organization will have to decide whether outside experts have the standing in the field and the degree of objectivity that would justify the added expense, or whether the job could be done with sufficient expertise by its own staff, without taking too much time away from the project itself.

Methods of measurement, whether standardized tests, interviews, questionnaires, observation, etc., will depend upon the nature and scope of the project. Procedures and schedules for gathering, analyzing, and reporting data will need to be spelled out.

Future Funding

The last narrative part of the proposal explains what will happen to the program once this grant ends. It should describe any prior commitments of support for a successful demonstration project. It should outline all other contemplated fund-raising efforts and future plans for applying for additional grants. Projections for operating and maintaining facilities and equipment should also be given.

This is the place to indicate whether any income will be generated by the project, either in the form of service-based fees or salable products.

Budget

While the degree of specificity of any budget will vary depending upon a nature of the project and the requirements of the funding source, a complete, well thought out budget serves to reinforce the applicant's credibility, and to increase the likelihood of the proposal's being funded. The estimated expenses in the budget should build upon the justifications given in the narrative section of the proposal. A well prepared budget should be reasonable and demonstrate that the funds being asked for will be used wisely.

The budget should be as concrete and specific as possible in its estimates. Every effort should be made to be realistic, to estimate costs accurately, and not to underestimate staff time.

The budget format should be as clear as possible. It should begin with a Budget Summary, which, like the Proposal Summary, is only written after the entire budget has been prepared. Each section of the budget should be in outline form, listing line items under major headings and subdivisions. Each of the major components should be subtotaled with a grand total placed at the end. If the funding source provides forms, most of these elements can simply be filled into the appropriate spaces.

Generally, budgets are divided into two categories: **Personnel costs and non-personal costs**. The personnel section usually includes a breakdown of salaries (including increases in multi year projects), such fringe benefits as health insurance and Social Security, and consultant and contract services. The items in the non-personnel section will vary widely, but may include: space costs, utilities, purchase or rental of equipment, training to use new equipment, photocopying, office supplies, postage, insurance, travel, etc.

For each item there should be two columns, headed "Requested" and "Donated." The "Requested" column lists those amounts, which the funding source is being asked to provide. The "Donated" column represents amounts coming from elsewhere, anticipated earned income, and services or equipment, which are being contributed to the project.

Before the budget is put into final form, it should be reviewed for cost effectiveness. It may be necessary to go back to the narrative to explain any seemingly high costs.

Appendix

Lengthy documents which are referred to in the narrative are best added to the proposal in the Appendix. Examples include letters of endorsement, partial list of previous funders, key staff resumes, annual reports, statistical data, maps, pictorial material, and newspaper and magazine articles about the organization.[1]

Common Mistakes in Grant Writing[2]

[1] Most of this content was obtained from the Funding Center at Michigan State University Libraries. For more information check: http://www.lib.msu.edu/harris23/grants/crsrpt.htm

[2] Most of this content is from http://www.casanet.org/program-management/resource-dev/gntwrite.htm

- **Deviation from the grant guidelines** – make sure to limit the grant narrative to the exact topics required by the grant guidelines. The inability to follow guidelines is the major reason why grant proposals are rejected. Also, public and private funding organizations normally set up their guidelines as a preliminary screening devise.
- Be careful of **overkill**. If the granting agency stipulates a one or two page grant proposal, follow their request by describing your organization and project in a brief but clear manner. By following the guidelines to the letter of the law, your will insure that your grant proposal will pass the first hurdle and be in favorable position for funding.
- Submit grant proposals only to the those organizations that have historically supported the kinds of projects that you are submitting for funding. Research into the "needs" of the funding organization is ESSENTIAL to the successful funding of any grant proposal.
- **Do not assume you know what the guidelines mean if they are unclear**. If they seem unclear to you, inquire in the organization to clarify! Regardless of location, telephone the "contact" person and attempt to clarify the guidelines.
- Read the instructions carefully because every set of grant guidelines is different. If there are no guidelines, conversations with the "contact" person will help you determine what the agency or foundation is looking for and what it wants to support. **Don't ever just submit a proposal! Make sure that you inquire about the kinds of projects that the funder typically supports**
- Tailor your grant proposal to the individual granting body. **Never use a proposal that was written for another organization.**
- After mailing the grant proposal, be sure to conduct follow up by calling the "contact person" in the funding body to inform him/her that the grant application has been mailed
- As grant review time approaches, write a letter or personally telephone the "contact" person to bring him/her up to date on the progress of your organization.
- Submitting the application late: DON'T! Be sure to follow the deadlines. It might be helpful to categorize the grants according to deadline dates and schedule the grants according to deadline dates, size of the grant, likelihood of funding, etc. Give priority to those that fund on a first come first serve basis.
- DON'T submit an incomplete application!
- Always type grant applications. Never turn in hand written applications.
- Bad Math: In the proposed budgets, always double check figures to eliminate math errors.
- In most cases, never turn in an application before 1-month prior to deadline. Things change, the "contact person" may quit, and your grant application may be lost.

A bad grant application may create a negative reputation which you may have difficulty overcoming in the future.

What happens if your grant request is refused:

- Write the "contact person" a note thanking him/her for considering you. Ask the "contact person" for the deadline of the next funding period
- Find out what kind of 'no' you received. Did you just barely miss receiving the grant or were you entirely off-base? Try to determine whether you should resubmit for the

next funding round. "Be persistent, no one will want to talk to you if you've been declined — it's just not a pleasant conversation," according to Joel Orosz, a program officer at the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. If you are able to talk to the program officer, do not be defensive.. Ask where you ranked on the quality scale and what you might do differently in the future. Aside from providing help with the program or proposal, the conversation builds a relationship and helps your chances for the next funding round.

- Telephone the "contact person" six months later. Provide him/her with a brief update on the progress of your program.

So what kinds of projects get funded?[3]

• **Innovation.** While projects do not need to be "wild and crazy new," they should be new for the community, and the proposal should point this out.

• **Comprehensiveness.** According to Orosz, "Complex problems need a comprehensive response," "If a project won't solve the problem there is no reason to fund it." The proposal needs to show that the applicant has taken all sides of a problem into account in designing the program and joining with appropriate partners.

• **Preparation.** The proposal should show that the applicant has done its homework, both about the foundation and the project, and should provide context for the project. If there is room, it might be helpful to describe what others have done and where the project fits in with the latest ideas in the field.

• **Cooperation.** Applicants must make it clear that the project is being done with, not to, the target population. Programs put into place without significant input from those whom they are meant to serve are rarely successful. Beneficiary participation in the project's planning and implementation needs to be more than token,

• **Beneficiaries.** "When writing your proposal, keep the beneficiaries front-and-center," Orosz said. "Don't focus on the organization's internal needs." As an example, he cited a proposal from an organization that served migrant farmworkers. In its request for capital funds and computer equipment, the applicant only mentioned the migrant farm workers in the title of the proposal. The implication was that the farmworkers would benefit because the organization would benefit, but the direct gains for the population served should be spelled out in the proposal..

• **Continuation.** Proposals should provide a plan for continued funding for the project beyond the grant period. Having a continuation plan will put a proposal ahead of about 75 percent of the other applicants. However, the plan needs to call for more than another foundation grant. Funders like to see continuation plans that include a diversity of funding sources.

• **Impact.** A project that is purely local is okay, Orosz said, "but if it could serve as a model, foundations get excited." A proposal that includes a plan for disseminating the project to a broader audience will also be ahead of the game, he said.

[3] From http://www.grantsandfunding.com/grantsandfunding/reports/writingproposals.html

In conclusion, Orosz said applicants need to remember that winning a grant is a time-intensive process, a matter of building relationships, not just sending proposals to objective foundations.

At this point, you should start developing a list of potential funders in your local community, national and international. Use the above guidelines to assist you in identifying appropriate organizations.

Exercise 3

1) Identify one problem in the community that you work with. If you haven't yet, come up with a potential project. Outline the objectives and methods.

2) If there is a business or businessman you might know of who might be interested in supporting you in funding your project, how will you go about contacting him/getting in touch with him/her?

3) In your experience, have you had any grant proposals rejected? If so, why do you think that is?

4) What have been problems in the past (or problems that you foresee now) in the scope of writing the grant proposal?